

****ATTENTION****

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DEER WINTER RANGE

Your forest practice application to the Department of Natural Resources shows that the proposed timber harvest is in an area that could be important for deer winter range. When deer summer range at higher elevations becomes snow-covered, both white-tailed and mule deer move to lower elevations for forage and cover. Suitable winter range is not plentiful because these low elevation areas are also important for agriculture, forestry and human habitation. These areas are increasingly important for maintaining our state's deer population.

Winter range provides deer with the basics for survival: water, forage, thermal cover to help reduce body heat loss, and hiding cover for security. Forest practices can affect any of these needs, but the effects can be positive if carried out with the animals in mind. There are several things you can do to enhance your land for wintering deer.

WATER

If there is water on your property — even if it's only a marsh, intermittent stream or spring — it is important not only to deer but to most other

wildlife. During harvest, try to avoid these areas. You might consider leaving a Riparian (streamside) Management Zone around such waters. For waters that are classified as type 1, 2 or 3 by the Department of Natural Resources, this zone is already required in most cases. The zone consists of trees and shrubs that are left in place to protect water quality, provide shade, and enhance fish and wildlife habitat. Deer may use these zones as travel corridors.

FORAGE

In general, a deer will use about one to three square miles (640 to 1920 acres) of area during the winter. The size of area used is dependent upon such factors as winter severity, population density and habitat quality. In this wintering area, it is important to have approximately 60 percent food and 40 percent cover with adequate dispersion. Since deer are primarily browsers (eating shrubs rather than grass), any activity that will increase shrubs preferred by deer will be valuable until the 60:40 ratio of forage to cover is exceeded. The shrubs that deer depend on vary from area to area,

but in Eastern Washington include serviceberry, ceanothus (buckbrush), rose, willow and bitterbrush. Creating openings in the forest will sometimes allow more shrub seeds to germinate and grow. Some shrub seeds need to have their outer shells burned or otherwise broken down to germinate. This can be accomplished by mechanical scarification or burning. For example, ceanothus can be rejuvenated by light spot burning in decadent patches.

It is important that cover be retained near feeding areas to provide protection from predators. Deer generally will not use areas of food farther than 600 feet from cover.

COVER

Two kinds of cover are vital to deer: thermal and hiding. Thermal cover helps deer endure the heat of summer and the cold of winter. You will often find winter and summer beds under patches of thermal cover. Trees most valuable for thermal cover in winter are conifers. They should provide a dense canopy and be large enough (at least pole-size) to intercept snow and radiate heat down to the deer underneath. Patches of thermal



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cover should be at least two acres in size. The larger the average tree diameter, the more functional the patch will be as thermal cover.

Hiding cover prevents predators from seeing deer; it can be shorter than thermal cover. Hiding cover should also be in patches at least 200 feet wide. When roads will be left open after harvest, it is important to retain hiding cover along the roadside to screen the deer from view. Hiding cover should also be left between openings so that deer can travel from one opening to another.

SECURITY

Deer need protection from human disturbance, predators, and the weather. Timber harvest can affect security in two ways. First, roads built for timber harvest are sometimes used for a long time after the harvest. While seldom-used roads may have little impact on the deer, frequent road use can be disturbing and detrimental. Closing unnecessary roads will eliminate this source of disturbance.

Secondly, harvesting trees can directly eliminate cover. This is often

the most difficult habitat element to provide for deer, since the objective of timber harvest is to remove trees.

Leaving some cover is of particular importance when clearcut, seed tree or shelterwood cuts are being used.

Leaving enough cover is important in partial cuts, too. Some cover should be provided within the harvested area if the opening created by timber harvest is more than 1,200 feet across (approximately a 35-acre cut). If this cover is provided, deer will be more likely to use the harvested area for foraging.

ADJACENT LANDS

In promoting the protection and/or enhancement of deer winter range habitat, consideration should be given to neighboring land use activities which may be adversely impacted by deer utilization carryover from adjacent lands.

NEED HELP?

If you have questions, or would like assistance in designing your timber harvest to enhance wildlife, call your Department of Wildlife

office and ask to speak to a Timber, Fish, and Wildlife Coordinator.

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